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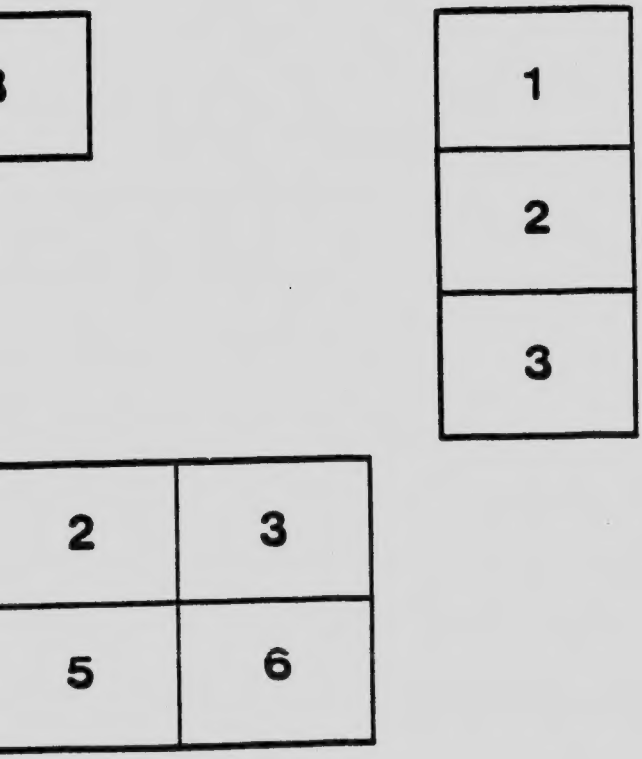

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No. IV.

THE BRITISH NAVY AND WORLD FREEDOM

BY

THE HON. BENJAMIN RUSSELL, M.A., LL.D.

Judge of the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia

There is no competent authority in the world to-day who does not recognize the British Navy as one of the best established factors in the whole War situation of 1914-18. But for the splendid efficiency of British fleets and the sterling devotion of men of all grades, from the great Admiral at their head down to the humblest individual in the ranks of British seamen; but for the sailors' tireless exertions and dreary vigils by night and day, in fair weather and foul, through the long, cold, bitter winters as well as in less trying or difficult seasons of the year; but for these conditions and these alone, all the bravery of our gallant soldiers, all the strategy of our able Generals, all the devotion and sacrifices of our patriotic men and women at home would have proved fruitless and vain.

Without the British Navy the free development of Anglo-Saxon institutions in both hemispheres would have been imperilled and the homes and unity of the British Empire destroyed; the Prussian ideal of the State would have been triumphant throughout the continent of Europe and the Pan-German dream of universal dominion become a dismal, a terrible, but an assured reality throughout the world.

Let us devoutly thank the Giver of all good and perfect gifts that He ever put it into the hearts and brains of our Island ancestors in the great Homeland, to realize that the finger of destiny had pointed to the Sea as the sphere of her true greatness and power. As a result Great Britain now holds Canadian affections more securely than ever before and has won the new affection and esteem of many who had in previous years been either coldly indifferent to her splendid history, or unkindly critical, or frankly hostile to her Empire development. Let us be thankful to the thought which her poet sang:

> We need no bulwarks nor towers along the steep;
> Our march is o'er the mountain wave, our home is on the deep.

It is a curious and interesting fact that, as between the two great branches of our defensive service, the affections of our Island ancestors have been attracted toward the Naval as against the Military service. The roots of this preference lie

deep in the history of England. The English people have always displayed a certain jealousy of standing armies and our American cousins have inherited the prejudice and perhaps enlarged upon its original intensity. But no such feeling has ever clouded the fame or obscured the merits of the Naval branch of the Service. Every man in England has known and felt that the Navy could never, by any possibility, become an instrument for the establishment or promotion of arbitrary power. Its function has always been a purely defensive one, and its mission, ever since it acquired an assured ascendancy upon the seas, has been to secure, not for itself alone, or for the British Empire alone, but for all the nations of the world, a real "freedom of the seas." In this great task it has been latterly seconded by the Navy of the United States, but I fervently trust that no ignorant cry for some new and mythical freedom of the seas will ever induce the British people and their Empire to part with any fraction of a power which has made their fleets invincible during the World-War and will continue to do so in the future splendid task of safeguarding Empire unity and liberty and democratic civilization throughout the world.

What else, indeed, but the British passion for freedom of every kind—freedom of rule, freedom of thought, freedom of speech, freedom of commerce—has preserved the world in these latter days from German domination?

What but the British love for a liberty which is not the privilege of any favoured minority, or even of any favoured community, or race, but the universal and inextinguishable right of every human being—what but this ineradicable English passion for freedom and justice nerved the spirit of Exmouth when, at the head of his little fleet, he sailed for Algiers and broke up the nest of Barbary pirates, for the advantage, not of British commerce especially, but for the benefit of all the little helpless and defenceless communities whose ships were being seized and their citizens enslaved or murdered. What but this love of freedom made the earlier and greater victory of Howard over the Spanish Armada possible or saved the liberties of the world under Nelson at Trafalgar? What but this British-guarded freedom of the seas made a peaceful United States development possible and Colonial growth over far-sundered seas a living reality?

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